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THE FAMILY ISSUE

From fostering hope to fighting for rights, these parents are parenting out loud

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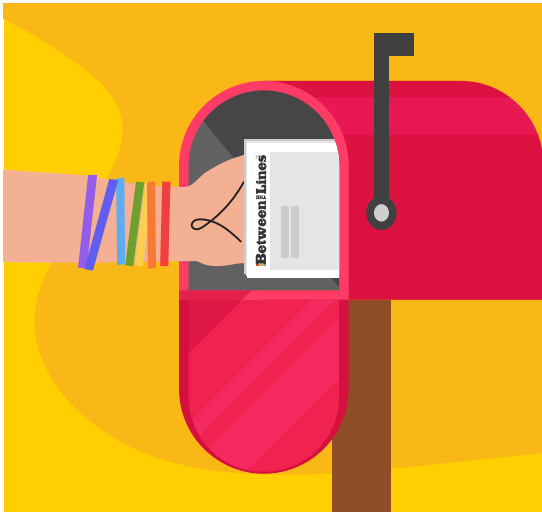




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Illustration: Cheryl Tuesday



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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY KELLI DUNHAM

July's queer calendar is giving us so many options — it's like a gay Cheesecake Factory menu, but with more sequins and less call for Lactaid. Want a low-stimulation hang with community and snacks? A music fest with poolside vibes? A deep conversation about hardship and hope with a celebrated queer author? A night of comedy supercharged with alliteration? This list has something for every mood, from introvert-recharging to extrovert-flirting. Whether you're dancing, reading, laughing or digesting (emotionally or literally), there's something here for you.



Katie Kincaid (left) and Catherine McCafferty (right) at a Lesbian Lodge performance. Photo: Instagram/@thelesbianlodge

Laugh at the Lesbian Lodge

The Lesbian Lodge is in town from Chicago on their Midwest tour and they're bringing top-tier comedy, storytelling and yearning to Planet Ant. Led by comedians Katie Kincaid and Catherine McCafferty, this community-centered showcase is all about celebrating lesbian and lesbian-adjacent performers — and inviting the rest of us to bask in the glory. Expect witty stand-up, heartfelt performances and maybe a tasteful thirst trap or two. Just don't expect any U-Haul jokes. Except perhaps ironically. Come early to mingle; stay late to flirt.

July 11, 7:30 p.m., Planet Ant — Ant Hall Stage (2320 Caniff St., Hamtramck) Find out more here: [instagram.com/thelesbianlodge](https://www.instagram.com/thelesbianlodge).



Dive Into Disability Pride

The Disability Pride Cookout is here to remind you that joy is resistance, and hot dogs help. This queer-affirming, low-spoon-friendly, low-pressure hangout is created for disabled folks who want to eat well, vibe gently and mark the 35th anniversary of the ADA with others who get it. Expect community care, access-centered design (ASL, low-stim room, masking highly encouraged, scent-awareness), and the kind of gathering where no one minds if you leave early or need to lay down. Come as you are, not as capitalism thinks you should be.

July 25, 4 p.m., The LOVE Building (4731 Grand River Ave., Detroit). More details here: bit.ly/disabilitypridecookout.



Nikki Holland. Photo: Alisabeth Von Presley

Sing Along in Saugatuck

The Saugatuck LGBTQ Music Fest is returning to Campit Outdoor Resort, bringing two whole days (and three evenings) of noteworthy (see what we did there?) fun. Friday starts with opening night under the Big Top and ends with a midnight swim and campfire in the wee hours. Saturday and Sunday feature a metric ton of musical acts, headlined by Nikki Holland and The Dirty Elizabeths. If you're less of a Hardy Homo and more of an Indoor Queen, don't let Campit's name fool you: They have a wide range of lodging options, some of which don't involve sleeping anywhere near the ground.

July 25-27, Campit Outdoor Resort (6635 118th Ave, Fennville). Reserve your space at campitresort.com/events.



Rex Ogle. Photo: rexogle.com

Talk About Hard Times

Award-winning queer author Rex Ogle joins the Detroit Public Library for a virtual event that promises to be honest, heart-wrenching and filled with hope. Ogle will share the experiences he described in his lauded book "Free Lunch": growing up poor in a wealthy school district, navigating violence at home and finding moments of grace in the chaos. Aimed at 5th–8th graders but meaningful for anyone who knows how hard it can be to be the "free lunch" kid, this is a great way to open conversations with the young queer people in your life. Or maybe your own inner middle schooler.

July 23, 2 p.m., online via Detroit Public Library, register at bit.ly/freelunchrex.



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J Draper (right) giving a historic tour in London. Photo: jdraper.co.uk

Hope for Happy Homo History

Since our LGBTQ+ communities have once again been handily shaped into a wedge in recent months, I'm reminding anyone who will listen (and probably a few folks who aren't listening at all): We've always been here. And to reinforce this fact, I've been trying to spend a little time each month reading (or watching or listening to) queer history. Enter YouTuber J Draper.

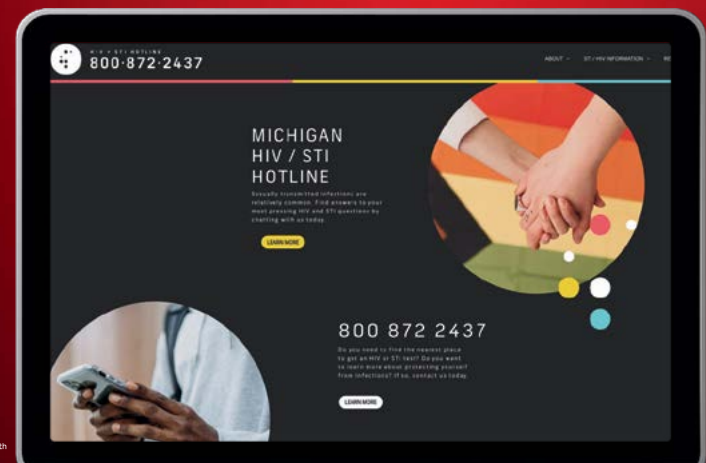
Draper's channel covers much more than LGBTQ+ history; her almost hour-long video essay breaking down the historical accuracy of the "Muppet Christmas Carol" is so passionate and precise it could've melted Scrooge's cruel cold heart. But J doesn't shy away from queer history — for example, she examines who was the first person to suggest Sherlock Holmes and Watson were more than just buddies. Highly recommended as a little antidote to erasure.

Find J Draper's queer history playlist at youtube.com/@JDraper.

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Martin Contreras and Keith Orr during their 2014 wedding ceremony. Courtesy photo

HOW THE ROAD TO FEDERAL MARRIAGE EQUALITY RAN THROUGH MICHIGAN

The 2014 wedding that became part of the movement that reached the Supreme Court

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

When Keith Orr first introduced Martin Contreras as his husband at the neighborhood gay bar they owned together during Sunday brunch in March 2014, he paused for dramatic effect. The dining room at Aut Bar in Ann Arbor's Braun Court was overflowing with celebrants who had gathered to mark both the couple's wedding

and Michigan's brief window of marriage equality. Even as they served the crowd, the newlyweds were still processing their own whirlwind day.

After nearly three decades together, Martin and Keith had finally been able to legally marry. Yet here they were, back at work, hustling between kitchen and dining room to feed a community that had come to celebrate with

them — unaware they were toasting not just a wedding, but a legal revolution.

"Back in the kitchen is my husband Martin," Keith announced to the packed room, then mock-checked his wrist. "My husband of about two hours."

The applause that followed wasn't just for the couple's newlywed status — it was for a moment that seemed impossible just hours earlier. What

none of the celebrants could have known that March day was that they were witnessing a pivotal moment in a legal battle that would reshape marriage equality nationwide.

The Michigan case that allowed the couple to marry would become the cornerstone of the decision that made marriage equality the law of the land just over a year later, when the Supreme Court ruled on *Obergefell v. Hodges*,

guaranteeing marriage equality across all 50 states.

The path to that victory ran directly through Michigan, where couples like Keith and Martin were among approximately 300 who rushed to marry during the state's brief "window" on March 22, 2014. Their legal challenge,

See **Marriage Equality**, page 9

Governor Whitmer Absolutely Ate On TikTok's 'Gaydar' Quiz Show

Michigan's governor proves she knows her LGBTQ+ trivia

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Picture this: Michigan's governor gets quizzed on gay bars, queer slang and Progress Flag colors by a drag queen on TikTok. Sounds like a fever dream? Nope, it's just another day in Big Gretch's world.

"Gaydar," the viral TikTok show hosted by trans creator Anania, has become legendary for its fast-paced quiz format that determines whether guests are "gay, straight or a homophobe" based on their knowledge of queer history and culture. The show boasts 286,800 followers, more than 80 million views and 12.1 million likes after launching in July 2024, and has featured everyone from Chappell Roan to Bob the Drag Queen.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer recently joined the show's roster of guests, and honestly? She came prepared. While our faithful readers and followers of Whitmer already know about her steadfast LGBTQ+ advocacy and policy wins, we learned a few delightful new things from her "Gaydar" appearance, including that she has her own hilarious definition for MLM. In an interview that showcased both her policy knowledge and personal connection to the LGBTQ+ community, Whitmer once again demonstrated why she's earned a reputation as a fierce ally.

Here are seven things we learned about Whitmer's allyship from her "Gaydar" appearance:

She said what she said about gay bars. When asked to name a gay bar in Michigan, Whitmer didn't hesitate: "Gigi's in Detroit. But my favorite gay bar was Spiral. It was in Lansing, Michigan. My mother was the one that actually took me there for the first time." She explained that her mom "liked to dance," making for what Anania called a "woke mama" moment.

She understood the assignment on Michigan LGBTQ+ history. Whitmer correctly identified Michigan as the first state to elect an openly LGBTQ+ person to public office, specifically naming Ann Arbor as the city and Kathy Kozachenko as the person. Her knowledge of local queer history runs deep.

She's not about to let anti-trans bills pass, period. When asked about her pledge to veto anti-trans legislation, Whitmer was unequivocal: "Trans people are people. Period. And they deserve to have respect and protection of the law. Right now, all the crap coming out of D.C. makes everyone feel less safe, and it's wrong. And so I wanted



Gov. Gretchen Whitmer appeared on the TikTok show "Gaydar" on June 27, 2025.

to send a message to my community: I got your back."

She served major legislative wins. Whitmer highlighted one of her proudest achievements: "A year and a half ago, I was able to sign full civil rights protections for the LGBTQ community. That means before two years ago, if you were gay or trans, nonbinary, you could be thrown out of your home or fired from your job because of who you are or how you identify. You now are protected from that, and I'm damn proud of that." The governor was referring to her 2023 signing of an amendment to Michigan's Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act, which extended discrimination protections to LGBTQ+ residents.

She's been doing the work with Michigan's LGBTQ+ commission. When asked about the first state to create an LGBTQ+ commission, Whitmer proudly claimed Michigan, explaining "they give us counsel as to how we can make sure that people got full civil rights, that they've got protections. We've done things like legitimize and legalize surrogacy, pay to be seen in Michigan, protecting every person who wants to go on the parental journey, no matter what that journey looks like."

She's got the tea on queer culture and clapped back perfectly. Whitmer showed off her knowledge of queer terminology, correctly defining "serving" as "looking good" and noting the brown and black stripes on the Progress Flag represent "brown and Black people." She even joked about MLM standing for "Midwest Lesbian Mom, which is me" before correctly identifying it as "men loving men." When asked to rank the Great Lakes in order of queerness, Whitmer picked Lake Michigan because "you get the sunsets and

Saugatuck is maybe the gayest community in Michigan, and it's on Lake Michigan." Anania's cheeky response about "Soggy Tuck" earned a perfect comeback from the governor: "You're on your own journey, Anania." When asked about her favorite queer artist, Whitmer named Cole Escola and mentioned she's "taking my girls to 'Oh, Mary!' tomorrow night."

She came through with the best parenting advice. When asked for three ways parents can support their queer children, Whitmer's response was heartfelt: "By loving them, by fighting for them, and by telling their story as parents, and making space for other parents to do that same thing." She also revealed her close relationship with her daughters when discussing a hypothetical dinner party with queer icons, saying she'd invite Freddie Mercury and Chappell Roan, "and I'd bring my daughter. She'd be really pissed if I left her out." When Anania joked about her other daughter being excluded, Whitmer quipped "her younger sister was going to be mad, but she's not queer, so you're out." Whitmer's elder daughter is openly lesbian.

Whitmer's "Gaydar" appearance reminded us exactly why we're going to miss Big Gretch when she terms out of office at the end of 2026. Her appearance on the show comes as "Gaydar" continues to provide what creator Anania calls "an accessible entry point for folks to learn about queer history — whether it be legislative progress, iconic activism, or cornerstone cultural moments."

The governor's performance earned Anania's final assessment: "I think you're straight, but you're a fierce ally." Whitmer's response: "A hundred percent. I'm a fierce ally."

The Crucial Role of Family in the Survival of LGBTQ+ Individuals

BY JOE KORT, PH.D.

Director of The Center for Relationship and Sexual Health in Royal Oak

For LGBTQ+ youth struggling with mental health crises, family acceptance isn't just helpful — it can be lifesaving.

LGB youth who come from highly rejecting families are 8.4 times as likely to have attempted suicide as LGB peers who reported no or low levels of family rejection, according to research by The Family Acceptance Project. The Trevor Project has also documented that LGB youth are almost five times more likely to attempt suicide and nearly three times more likely to seriously contemplate suicide compared to their heterosexual peers. Among transgender adults, 40% report having made a suicide attempt, with 92% of those attempts occurring before age 25.

These stark statistics underscore why family acceptance is such a critical protective factor. When LGBTQ+ youth face rejection at home on top of societal discrimination, the risks compound dramatically. However, when families provide acceptance and support, they can serve as a powerful buffer against these negative outcomes.

Do you want an LGBTQ+ child or a dead child?

These numbers aren't just statistics — they represent a stark choice families face. This question has become a popular meme online, but the sentiment is supported by research. High levels of family rejection lead to youth who are not only more prone to suicide, but six times more likely to experience high levels of depression, three times more likely to try illegal drugs and at much greater risk for HIV and STI.

Research confirms that family acceptance is the most powerful protective factor against negative physical and mental health outcomes for LGBTQ+ children — but that doesn't mean it's easy. When a child comes out as LGBTQ+, the family often finds itself going into the closet. Affirming parents and family members must navigate going against cultural norms and face the prospect of their own coming-out process to neighbors, extended family and friends.

Unfortunately, our nation and its current leadership appears to be trying to put the toothpaste — the growing acceptance of diverse gender identities and acceptance — back into the toothpaste tube. Children are not being "groomed" or "seduced" into some nefarious gender identity; they are born with it. Clinical experience shows most LGBTQ+ people realize their identity in early childhood. That's reality, not ideology or propaganda.

What, then, is needed?

LGBTQ+ youth often face devastating mental health challenges, but families hold the power to change outcomes. Parents and caregivers must find compassion when their child questions their identity and initiate honest, supportive conversations. The alternative — exclusion, suffering and potential death — is unacceptable.

Not sure where to begin? Seek support from resources like The Trevor Project, Stand with Trans' Lifeline Library and local LGBTQ+ organizations, and consider family therapy with compassionate professionals experienced in LGBTQ+ issues.

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Foster Hope, Build Families: How LGBTQ+ Michiganders Can Make a Difference Through Foster Care

More than 6,000 Michigan children in the state foster care system need homes

BY ANDREA POTEET-BELL

Ever wondered if foster care is for you? Whether you're LGBTQ+, single, partnered or somewhere in between — the answer is simple: absolutely.

Right now, roughly 10,000 children are in Michigan's foster care system. Fewer than 4,000 licensed foster homes exist to meet that need. And while the goal of foster care is always to reunite kids with their families, those children still need a safe, stable and supportive place to land in the meantime.

That's where you come in.

Here's what you should know about the process of becoming a foster parent, the impact you can make and how to get started.

What foster care looks like in Michigan

Michigan prioritizes placing children with relatives when possible, but that isn't always an option. That's where foster parents step in, providing safe, stable and nurturing environments for children who have been removed from their homes.

"The challenge of placing children has grown over time," said Demetrius Starling, senior deputy director for the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Children's Services Administration. "Post-Covid, we're seeing fewer licensed families, which creates a gap between the number of children needing homes and those available."

MDHHS strives to place children as close to their homes and communities as possible, helping maintain connections with their families, schools and local support systems. The greatest need for foster homes is concentrated in Michigan's largest counties — Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Genesee and Kent — which together account for over half of the state's children in care. Expanding foster families in these areas is crucial to keeping children near the people and places they know.

High-need populations include sibling groups — who MDHHS works hard to keep together — and children with developmental, emotional or medical needs.



"Separation from family is a form of trauma in itself," Starling added. "We need foster parents who are patient, understanding and ready to help children heal."

LGBTQ+ families: essential to the solution

Despite common misconceptions, LGBTQ+ people — single or married — are fully eligible to become foster parents in Michigan. Monica Jackson, statewide adoptive and foster parent recruitment and retention coordinator with MDHHS, said many LGBTQ+ individuals are surprised to learn this.

"Sexual orientation or marital status has nothing to do with whether you qualify," she said. "What matters is your desire and ability to care for children."

Jackson emphasizes that LGBTQ+ families are truly welcomed, supported and valued within the foster care system. She

noted, "Nationally, these families are more likely to follow through with the licensing process than some of their counterparts."

She also encourages prospective foster parents to explore agencies to find one that aligns with their values, especially if they have concerns about religious or other affiliations or cultural fits. The Foster Care Navigator Program can help with that process (more on that below).

What makes a great foster parent?

There's no one-size-fits-all mold for a great foster parent. Whether you're single or partnered or renting or own your home, the key ingredients are emotional readiness, a support network and space in your life — and heart — for a child in need.

"We ask all foster parents to name substitute care providers, people in their lives who can step in when they're unavailable," Jackson explained. "Whether

you're single or a couple, what matters is that you have support."

She emphasizes that children coming into foster care often have complex needs, and successful foster parents are those who approach these children with patience, empathy and a willingness to learn.

The impact is lifelong

Foster care is designed to be temporary, with the ultimate goal of reunification. But even temporary placements leave a lasting imprint.

Jackson recalls a former residential therapy client, a 12-year-old boy who had lived in more than 20 foster homes. "He could name every family he had stayed with and describe each one in detail," she said. "Children don't forget. The impact you make stays with them forever."

She also points to LGBTQ+ families who

See **MDHHS**, page 15

sparked by Hazel Park couple April DeBoer and Jayne Rowse's fight for adoption rights, would ultimately force the Supreme Court's hand and secure marriage equality for millions of Americans.

The reluctant grooms

When Martin and Keith met in 1986, marriage wasn't even on their radar. For Keith, coming out in the early 1980s meant rejecting what he saw as heterosexual constructs.

"Back then, when I was coming out in the late early '80s, the idea of even getting married to a same-sex partner was not even something I imagined would ever happen in my lifetime," Keith recalls. "And not only didn't imagine it happening, but I didn't want it. It was like, 'Why follow those straight constructs of what it means to have a relationship and a union and a commitment to each other?'"

That resistance wasn't uncommon in the LGBTQ+ community at the time. Many viewed marriage as a straight convention that didn't fit their lives or values, with influential voices like legal advocate Paula Ettelbrick arguing in her famous 1989 essay "Since When Is Marriage a Path to Liberation?" that marriage was "antithetical to my liberation as a lesbian and as a woman because it mainstreams my life and voice." As law professor Nancy Polikoff recalled in a 2013 Salon interview about the community's viewpoints on marriage equality in the '70s, "There was a significant contingent of people who identified as feminists who said, 'This is the wrong approach, this isn't what we should be doing.' That viewpoint carried the day for a long time." Keith admits he, too, "had to be convinced that gay marriage was something that was good for me or for us."

The turning point came when marriage equality advocate Evan Wolfson held events at Aut Bar and the couple's other Ann Arbor business, Common Language Bookstore. Wolfson argued that the legal protections and social recognition that marriage provided was reason enough, which mirrored shifting perspectives in the community.

While Michigan's LGBTQ+ activists were having these internal debates, the legal landscape was taking shape around them — and it was not good news for marriage equality proponents. In 1996, President Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act, defining marriage federally as between one man and one woman. Michigan voters would go further in 2004, approving a constitutional amendment that prohibited same-sex marriage with 59% support.

Throughout the early 2000s, as Michigan was earning a reputation as a "lost state" for LGBTQ+ rights under Republican leadership, Martin and Keith were building something different at Aut Bar — a community gathering space where LGBTQ+ people could feel safe and celebrated.

"There was a feeling of safety just walking into Braun Court," Keith remembers. "I felt it the first time I walked into the space."

That sense of safety would prove crucial as Michigan's legal battles intensified. When April DeBoer and Jayne Rowse, a lesbian couple from Hazel Park, first sued the state in 2012 over adoption rights, their case would eventually expand to challenge Michigan's marriage ban entirely. The couple, both nurses who wanted to ensure their adopted children had legal ties to both mothers, found their attorney in Dana Nessel, who would later become Michigan's first openly LGBTQ+ Attorney General.

The window opens

On March 21, 2014, U.S. District Judge Bernard Friedman ruled Michigan's ban on same-sex marriage unconstitutional, finding it violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment. What followed was a frantic day that would become known as Michigan's "window."

"We were like, let's do this. We needed to get married and put our foot in the door so that gay marriage or marriage equality had a chance to get a footing so that it would be a challenge to reverse all

these marriages," Keith explains.

The couple joined approximately 300 other same-sex couples who married in Washtenaw, Ingham, Oakland and Muskegon counties during the brief period before then-Attorney General Bill Schuette obtained a stay from the 6th Circuit Court, halting further marriages.

The power of that legal recognition became immediately apparent. After decades of long-term couples using various terms



Keith Orr and Martin Contreras during their 2014 wedding ceremony. Courtesy photo

— boyfriend, lover, significant other, partner — they suddenly had a word that carried universal meaning.

"If you say 'my husband,' you immediately know what that means and all of the rights and all of the protections and support structure that word contains," Keith reflects.

The long road from Michigan to the Supreme Court

In November 2014, the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals reversed Judge Friedman's decision and upheld Michigan's marriage ban, putting it at odds with other federal appeals courts that had struck down similar bans. This disagreement between circuits paved the way for Supreme Court intervention.

By January 2015, the Supreme Court agreed to hear the DeBoer case along with similar cases from Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee,

consolidated under *Obergefell v. Hodges*. Nessel remained a prominent advocate for DeBoer and Rowse as their case moved to the nation's highest court.

When the Supreme Court heard oral arguments on April 28, 2015, the LGBTQ+ community across Michigan watched and waited. At Braun Court, the community joined together as they often did for major moments.

"It was the place where you gathered whether it was out of joy or out of sadness," Keith recalls, remembering how the space filled during the Sept. 11 attacks and after the Pulse Nightclub shooting in 2016.

On June 26, 2015, the Supreme Court ruled 5-4 in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that the fundamental right to marry was guaranteed to same-sex couples. Justice Anthony Kennedy's majority opinion declared, "No union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice and family."

Braun Court filled with celebration, just as it had when Judge Friedman's Michigan marriage equality ruling came down. The late

advocate Jim Toy spoke at the anniversary celebration, declaring, "If we're looking for a monument, look around us: Braun Court is our monument. Braun Court is our history. Braun Court is our community."

In 2015, DeBoer and Rowse legally adopted all five of their children, finally achieving the family security they had sought since their initial lawsuit. Nessel was elected Michigan's Attorney General in 2018, continuing her advocacy from the state's highest legal office.

Looking ahead

Today, as out gay Rep. Jason Morgan (D-Ann Arbor) works to formally remove Michigan's constitutional marriage ban and Sen. Jeremy Moss confronts attempts to roll back marriage equality, the urgency felt by couples like Martin and Keith in 2014 still resonates, and the protective

instinct that drove couples to marry during Michigan's brief window persists. Keith recently officiated a wedding in California where the couple had already gone to a justice of the peace "between the 2024 election and the 2025 inauguration for the same reasons. It's like we have to try and protect our relationship. And that's California for God's sakes," Keith notes.

Morgan, who introduced House Joint Resolution F to remove the discriminatory language from Michigan's constitution in March, echoed these concerns: "We saw what happened when the Supreme Court disregarded precedent and overturned landmark cases like *Roe v. Wade*. We have one member of the court openly calling to 'reconsider' cases like *Obergefell*," he said in a news conference. "When people show you who they are, believe them."

For Martin and Keith, now retired and celebrating their 39th year together, the fight for marriage equality was just one chapter in a longer story of building community and advocating for LGBTQ+ rights. Their businesses provided safe spaces. Their activism supported crucial legislation. And, all these years later, their willingness to live openly as a couple continues to help normalize LGBTQ+ relationships.

"Coming out is an ongoing process throughout your entire life," Keith notes. "As queer people or as couples or as spouses." The couple continues to educate simply by existing authentically.

The lessons from their journey remain relevant for younger generations of LGBTQ+ advocates. As Keith puts it: "Take the victories you can. Sometimes that feels like you're giving up because you're not getting everything you want. But sometimes the smaller victories can help lead to the bigger victories."

Michigan's path to marriage equality — from constitutional prohibition to Supreme Court victory to ongoing protection efforts — reflects both how far the state has come and how much work remains. For couples like Martin and Keith, who lived through the entire arc of this struggle, the message is clear: Progress is possible, but it requires constant vigilance and a consistent resistance to efforts to claw back what we've won. We can all take a page from Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, who had this to say when MAGA-backed Rep. Josh Schriver advocated for rolling back marriage equality: "Hell no."

Supreme Court Majority Opinion Protects Kids From LGBTQ+ Books



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

I've had the song "Jesus He Knows Me" stuck in my head for a few days now. The song, originally by the British band Genesis, came out in 1992, though I've been playing the 2023 cover by Ghost.

"Jesus He Knows Me" is a take-down of for-profit evangelical preachers. You know, the ones who tell their followers that they can get closer to God by giving up their life savings. Meanwhile, the preacher gets closer to God in a private jet.

I just watched the Genesis video for the first time in probably 20 years on YouTube (preceded without irony by an ad urging men to trade porn for the Bible). It is much tamer than the Ghost video for the song, which is NSFW and most definitely intended to be offensive.

The song was timely in 1992 and it is timely now. One could argue it's even more so now with evangelical Christians who have embraced fascism happily running the U.S. government and dismantling it at the same time. But in 1992, the Christofascist takeover was already underway.

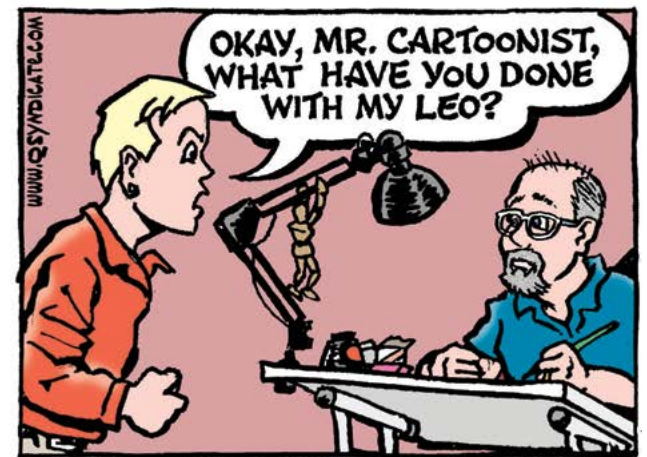
In 1992, George H.W. Bush was president after spending eight years as vice president under Ronald Reagan. It was Reagan who fully opened the door for evangelical Christians, giving them unprecedented governmental access and power. Prior to this, the whole "separation of church and state" thing was, well, more of a thing. Under Reagan, it became much less of a thing, though only for Christianity.

“

If after the prince and the knight said 'I do' someone burst into the venue with an assault rifle and murdered everyone, that would presumably be a fine celebration of both first and second amendment rights.

One of the lines from the song is, "I believe in the family with my ever-loving wife beside me. She doesn't know about my girlfriend or the man I met last night." This perfectly sums up the hypocrisy of Christofascism, which is so blatant and so obvious. And yet, millions of people either don't see it or pretend they don't see it based, in large part, on whether it personally benefits them.

And who benefits? White, heterosexual, cisgender men, mostly. White, heterosexual, cisgender women benefit, too,



though indirectly. They are protected by existing under the umbrella of white male power. Whether that protection is real or perceived does not seem to matter when it comes to white, heterosexual, cisgender women voting against their own interests, such as abortion rights or when it comes to voting for men for president who proudly commit sexual assault. It's a form of Stockholm Syndrome, really.

Nowhere is this more clearly on display than in the Supreme Court, which holds a 6 to 3 Christofascist majority. This means they can, and do, rule however the fuck they want regardless of pesky things like law or legal precedent or even basic human decency.

Take, for example, their recent decision in *Mahmoud v. Taylor* to allow parents to opt their children out of having any books with LGBTQ+ characters or themes used in their public school educations.

"One very likely consequence of *Mahmoud* is that schools will be very reluctant to teach any lesson that mentions homosexuality, transgender people or anything else that touches on queer sexuality or gender identity," reports Vox. "Mahmoud is likely to

impose a Florida-style 'Don't Say Gay' regime on every public school classroom in America."

In case you need a refresher, the "Don't Say Gay" law prohibits teaching about LGBTQ+ stuff in Florida's public schools.

The kicker is that parents can sue if their kids are exposed to the dangers of two people loving each other and/or living authentically. The *Mahmoud* decision will allow parents to sue even in states that don't have Florida's bigoted and restrictive laws on the books.

Justice Samuel Alito based his decision on some quite tortured logic.

"Alito argues that the books at issue are objectionable, not just because they feature LGBTQ+ characters, but because they suggest that certain aspects of queer culture should be 'celebrated,'" reports Vox. "One of the contested books is a medieval fairy tale about a prince who marries a knight. According to Alito...this book is objectionable not because it includes a same-sex wedding, but because it portrays this wedding as a good thing."

In other words, seeing gay love portrayed as positive is harmful to a child's fragile psyche. Now, if after the prince and the knight said "I do" someone burst into the venue with an assault rifle and murdered everyone, that would presumably be a fine celebration of both first and second amendment rights.

Using this method we could make a book like "And Tango Makes Three" palatable to conservatives by having the two male penguins who want to have a baby together suffocate in an oil spill. Or how about rewriting "Mommy, Mama and Me" to be about social services "rescuing" a child from lesbian parents and placing that child into an overcrowded foster home like God intended?

At the end of the day, the Supreme Court "has decided that in order to accommodate one identity group — religious conservatives — schools should be hypercautious about teaching books that feature members of another identity group — LGBTQ+ people," reports Vox.

And while the plaintiffs included Muslim parents, make no mistake, the same people who want to erase LGBTQ+ people want to erase Muslims, too. You don't get spared by partnering with Christofascists. You just make them stronger just in time to come for you, too.

THE SCROLL

QUICK HITS & CAN'T MISSES

'Bargain Block' Star Keith Bynum Slams HGTV After Show's Cancellation

Keith Bynum isn't holding back about his experience with HGTV following the cancellation of "Bargain Block," the hit Detroit-based home renovation series he starred in alongside husband Evan Thomas.

The 38-year-old designer took to Instagram on June 22 to blast the television industry, telling followers that TV is "full of some of the worst people I've ever encountered" after the show's four-season run ended.

"Our entire business and lives have been put through the ringer at the hands of a giant corporation," Bynum told People. He added that he and

Thomas "have always tried hard to stick to what we know and what we're good at, which is being ourselves."

The couple moved to Detroit sight unseen in 2017 and transformed abandoned properties into stylish starter homes for first-time homebuyers. Their show premiered in 2021 and attracted more than 14 million viewers while showcasing Detroit's revitalization.

In a July 4th weekend post, Bynum thanked fans for their overwhelming support. "Me, Evan and Shea have been shocked beyond belief to see the response," he wrote, promising future projects are coming.

Real estate expert Shea Hicks-Whitfield, who worked with the couple throughout the series, responded enthusiastically: "Yesss! Love y'all."



Shea Hicks-Whitfield, Evan Thomas and Keith Bynum. Photo: HGTV

Palmer Woods Home Tour Highlights LGBTQ+ History

The Palmer Woods Association's 2025 Home and Garden Tour on July 26 showcases stunning architecture while celebrating a neighborhood where LGBTQ+ residents have played a vital role in preserving Detroit's most elegant historic homes.

The tour features 10 locations, including a meticulously restored 1925 Tudor Revival and gardens of Frank Lloyd Wright's iconic Turkel House.

Palmer Woods became an LGBTQ+ hotspot in the early 1970s following post-1967 uprising migration patterns. Many queer residents were drawn to the neighborhood's architectural richness as demographics shifted and historic homes became more affordable.

Today's Palmer Woods maintains a strong LGBTQ+ presence with residents sharing a natural commitment to architectural preservation that has helped sustain the neighborhood's historic character for decades.

Jeremy Moss Shuts Down GOP Senator with Perfect Queer Comeback

State Sen. Jeremy Moss brought down the House recently with a perfectly timed queer comeback that left his Republican colleague speechless.

During a Michigan Senate session, Republican Sen. Jonathan Lindsey attempted to troll Democrats by suggesting they refer to President Trump as "daddy" in future resolutions, referencing NATO Chief Mark Rutte's recent comparison of Trump to a father figure.

"Maybe in these resolutions going forward, we could have a little bit of recognition of like, 'Daddy Trump,' is who we're going to oppose, or something like that," Lindsey suggested.

After a brief pause, Moss, the Senate's speaker pro tem, delivered his response: "You don't want to know what daddy means in my community."

The chamber erupted in laughter as Moss deflated Lindsey's trolling attempt with some well-timed queer sass. Moss shared a clip of the moment on social media, wishing everyone a "Happy Pride Month." The 39-year-old Democrat is running for U.S. Congress in 2026.

Gays Eating Garlic Bread, Swapping Clothes

The mysteriously delicious Gays Eating Garlic Bread on the Patio group returns to Detroit's Halo Bar & Lounge on July 25 from 7-11 p.m., this time featuring a clothing and goods swap. Attendees can bring clean, gently used items to share with the community. All unclaimed items will be donated to the Ruth Ellis Center and University of Michigan student resource closets. The event promises "carbs, queer joy, and community under the stars" at the Detroit venue located at 8070 Greenfield Road.

Don't Miss These Early July Pride Fests

Michigan's Pride season continues with three vibrant celebrations this month. **South Lyon Pride** returns July 12 at McHattie Park for its fifth annual "glitter-infused" celebration from noon to 4 p.m. **Battle Creek Pride** spans July 18-20 and features a Friday evening parade, a Saturday festival at Leila Arboretum and a Sunday candlelight vigil. Meanwhile, **Flint Pride** marks its 15th anniversary July 19 with a downtown takeover across multiple venues from 2-8 p.m., bringing "sparkle" to new stomping grounds as Riverbank Park undergoes renovations.

Jonathan Bailey's 'Slutty Little Glasses'

"Wicked" star Jonathan Bailey's wire-rimmed glasses from "Jurassic World Rebirth" — dubbed "slutty little glasses" by thirsty fans — have gone viral during the film's press tour. The openly gay actor told ET he's "thrilled that people are having a hormonal explosion linked to optical supports." Bailey has partnered with Cubitts to release "Shameless little glasses" in support of his LGBTQ+ charity, The Shameless Fund.



Jonathan Bailey. Photo: Instagram/@jbayleaf

How These Queer Local Artists Are Turning Creativity Into Rebellion

Kaleidoscope exhibit features 104 works that highlight LGBTQ+ voices

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

The fourth annual Kaleidoscope exhibition at Pontiac Creative Arts Center arrives at a moment when queer visibility feels both essential and precarious.

With 104 pieces from 56 LGBTQ+ artists now on display through July 23, visitors will encounter everything from vibrant oil paintings featuring queer intimacy to black-and-white photographs capturing raw vulnerability, traditional tattoo flash art reimagined as fine art and sculptural installations that challenge conventional gallery spaces. Taking a birds-eye view, it becomes impossible to describe the show in just a few words. The work includes a wide range of styles and artistic interpretations, but there is no doubt, an understood, if not always overtly stated, theme of “queer resistance” as the beating heart fueling the shared energy here.

Throughout the gallery space, delicate colored pencil drawings of tender moments between lovers intermingle with bold acrylic works featuring mythological figures surrounded by lotus flowers and mixed-media pieces incorporating everything from gold leaf to denim. These are pieces reflective of a challenging moment in our collective queer history, one defined as much by the diversity of the queer community as it is by one tie that increasingly binds us all together: survival. Despite the onslaught of LGBTQ+ targeting by the federal government since January, the queer community not only still exists, but thrives. Queer artists are creating works that reflect their lived experiences, from defiant statements to the quiet shared and solo moments that make up everyday life.

Derek Queen, secretary of Pontiac Creative Arts Center, said his team had a difficult time selecting the final pieces for the exhibit. “Our team was amazed by the amount of talent that we had gathered in our gallery,” he said. “Curating which pieces to include from our submission pool was

difficult because we only have so much space.”

Kaleidoscope’s timing feels deliberate, even if it wasn’t planned that way. “While this exhibit is the Center’s way of celebrating LGBTQ+ artists during Pride Month, I personally view it as our form of protest too,” Queen said. “Kaleidoscope reminds us how important visibility is in a time when others want to erase the community.”

Following the opening reception on June 21, BTL spoke with six local artists featured in the exhibition about their work, their creative process and what it means to be visible as queer artists right now. Read their full responses at [PrideSource.com](https://pridesource.com).

Chris Azzopardi

What keeps you creating when the world feels hostile to queer existence?

Art has been essential to me in processing the world right now. In my piece “But This Used to Be My Home,” which began from blots on a piece of paper that came out of me intuitively,

the image of an animal having to flee slowly emerged. That image became metaphorical in so many ways: It speaks to immigrants being forced out of this country and disappearing, and to the feeling of having to abandon the idea of America as home — especially as a queer person. Creating that piece allowed me to hold all of that grief, fear and displacement in a way that felt true. It’s one of the ways I’ve found to keep going.

Since I was a kid, art has given me a way to process what I can’t always, even as a journalist, put into words. Each piece in this show comes from something real I’ve felt — feeling left behind, feeling overwhelmed by the world. I’m grateful to stand alongside other LGBTQ+ artists and be part of something that celebrates our voices, especially now.

Note: Local queer artist Chris Azzopardi is the Pride Source Editorial Director.

Luca Holtyn

How does your work speak to the experience of claiming space as a queer person?

My two pieces in Kaleidoscope are very different. One is a traditional tattoo back piece titled “Battle Royale” that is a very old but popular design that many tattoo artists have recreated. As a trans person in a part of the tattoo industry that is built on tradition, it is important to me to learn and build off of the folks that came before me. I am here, I am a part of this community, and a part of the collective tattoo history. My second piece in Kaleidoscope is an illustrative black and gray portrait of four trans masc cowboys, titled “Outlaws.” They’re all posed in classic cowboy garb while holding repeater rifles.



“Play Date” by Emilia Nawrocki

With conservatism on the rise, being transgender or visibly transgender is slowly starting to be seen as a “crime.” Some of the cowboys in my painting have top surgery and some do not. They are unapologetically themselves, do not hide themselves from the world and lean on each other for support. I created this work to claim space and say we are here, we are not going to change for anyone and we are going to fight for our right to survive.

Emilia Nawrocki

How do you use your art to process experiences that might be difficult to express in other ways?

Growing up, I spent a large amount of my time isolated from others, whether from my family for being the black sheep or being ostracized at school for being abnormal —



Artwork by Luca Holtyn

my queerness and neurodiversity weren't as well hidden as I had hoped. In this isolation came shame, pain and a lack of being understood or feeling seen for who I truly was. I took my thoughts and feelings that I didn't feel I could verbalize and began to express them through my artwork. Creating was like my diary, my safe space to authentically be myself, a true mirror reflecting my innermost self.

In my personal life, as I was rejecting the Catholicism and conservatism I was raised in, it naturally trickled into my work. I now often focus on themes and ideas of identity, autonomy, religious trauma and feminism through figurative storytelling including humor, irony, apes, childhood memories and mythology.

Nicholas Overholt

Spectrum Award Recipient

What keeps you creating when the world feels hostile to queer existence?

It sometimes feels like the only thing I'm capable of doing. Like there's something that needs to be extracted and manifested and shouted into the void. It's not difficult to notice the hatred chomping at the edges



"Not Your Fucking Dragon Lady" by Gabrielle Slocum

of everyday existence, especially now, but I think we have a duty to carve out space and protect one another. And I think that extends beyond just our queer family, to

every marginalized community. Fascism's weakness is our shared resilience. I think making work that feels subversive in some way is like an affirmation of that notion. Radical or queer or whatever word we want to use is the antidote; it's so vital just to be and be seen right now — not to shrink ourselves.

Thiago Porraz

How do you use your art to process experiences that might be difficult to express in other ways?

As a neurodivergent queer person who grew up with a lot of trauma, many of my life experiences have been very isolating and difficult to talk about with those around me. Visual art provides me with a whole other language to communicate my experiences in ways other people can understand and relate to. One of my favorite aspects of art is the vastly different meanings people can see in a singular artwork; though my art may not communicate the specifics of an experience I went through, it communicates enough for me to feel seen and understood by the viewers who take time to look and understand. My hope is that these viewers also reflect their own experiences onto my work and feel seen and understood in return.

Gabrielle "Gabbi" Slocum

Prism Award Recipient

What do you hope viewers take away from seeing queer art in this moment?

I hope when viewers see queer art in this moment they acknowledge it as an active act of resistance because right now a lot of what's occurring in our political climate and how it affects our lives is destructive. Therefore, the act of creating, representing ourselves and the community, taking up space, celebrating our joy and simply existing in this moment is vitally important. I hope it inspires them to make art themselves, learn about the community and protect these spaces where we can gather and share our art.

Kaleidoscope is on display at the Pontiac Cultural Arts Center (47 Williams St.) through July 23. Visit pontiacarts.square.site for more information.



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Meet the Michigan Dad Championing His Daughter's Queer Debut Novel

Unwavering family acceptance helped Erica Peplin pursue her dream

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

The email from Larry Peplin landed in BTL's inbox with fatherly pride. His queer daughter Erica had just published her debut novel, "Work Nights," and he wanted to make sure it was on our radar. What made the message remarkable wasn't the announcement itself, but what it represented about the kind of family support that empowers queer artists to flourish.

Larry and Erica's relationship offers more than just a proud parent moment — it provides a window into a dynamic we don't hear enough about: the ongoing bond between supportive parents and their adult LGBTQ+ children. These bonds continue to matter deeply, creating the kind of foundation that enables people to pursue their most authentic paths.

Erica's journey from a Grosse Pointe childhood to published novelist exemplifies this dynamic perfectly. Born in Grosse Pointe to parents who work in Detroit's cultural scene — her mother as a registrar at the Detroit Institute of Arts and her father as a freelance photographer — Erica grew up surrounded by creativity and acceptance.

Though she has since moved to Brooklyn, Michigan remains foundational. "I grew up thinking Michigan was the world," Erica recalled. "And I remember learning about Michigan history in fourth grade and thinking that every fourth grader in America learned Michigan history because Michigan was so important. It was just the center of my world for so many years."

Despite that deep connection, she knew she needed to venture beyond her home state. "I did not want to go to school in Michigan when I turned 18 because I wanted to get away from home, which I think is good for kids," she explained. After college, she made an even bigger move. "I moved to New York City with no job because I just wanted to live in New York City. It just felt like a big city where I could be anyone I wanted."

Erica's independent spirit and self-determination didn't emerge overnight.

From childhood, Larry said, she displayed confidence in knowing who she was and what she wanted. And throughout it all, her family supported her authentic self-expression, laying the groundwork for the openly queer adult she is today.

"We basically enjoyed letting her be whoever she wanted to be and never really giving a lot of weight or worry about gay, lesbian, queer, whatever," Larry recalled. "To me, anyway, it wasn't a concern. Whatever she was going to be, she was going to be."

That acceptance showed up in small but meaningful ways throughout Erica's childhood. When she refused to venture down the pink aisles at Toys R Us, preferring action figures to dolls, her parents simply followed her lead. When she wanted to borrow clothes from her older brother or later from her father, there was no judgment.

Erica's older brother was equally

supportive. "He was so great cause he let me play with his 'Star Wars' toys and he let me wear his old clothes. When he grew out of his big T-shirts and his baggy shorts, I would always sneak into his room and just take them. And if he was annoyed, he didn't express it," she said.

"I can't recall Erica ever actually literally coming out on a given day," Larry said. "It's something we sort of just knew by osmosis."

This foundation of acceptance gave Erica the confidence to take significant risks in pursuit of her dreams. In New York, she landed positions in sales at CNN and The New York Times, but feeling less than fulfilled by age 26, she made what she calls "a momentous decision" to quit her stable office job to pursue writing full-time.

"It blew my mind because she had all these great benefits. She was making a nice salary," Larry admitted. "To me, as a former

journalist, that's the epitome, to work for The New York Times in any kind of a role. So for her to quit, I sort of struggled with that in my own head."

But Larry's support never wavered, even during the five years it took Erica to complete her novel while working part-time jobs to make ends meet. "She's an adult making adult decisions and I respect that," he said.

"I had some penny-pinching years there where I wasn't making much money, but I was living in a cheap apartment really far out in Brooklyn," Erica said. Living a more frugal lifestyle gave her the freedom to dedicate herself to writing her novel.

That novel, "Work Nights," published by Simon & Schuster in June, is an unapologetically queer story set in New York City. The book follows Jane Grabowski, a young woman navigating office life while caught between two romantic interests — an intern named Madeline and a musician named Addy.

"It's not about queer people having a hard time in life because they're queer. It's about queer people having a hard time in life because life is hard," Erica explained. "I want to write about bold queer people. I want to write about evil queer people. I want to write about bad, misbehaving queer people because I think that's part of life."

The novel draws from Erica's own experiences, including her family dynamics. Her father appears in the book as a "retired photographer" who is "so easygoing and laidback."

"I did write basically my dad's personality word for word," Erica said. "He's a great character. But it was nerve-wracking to then give the book to my dad because it's like, 'Dad, you inspired this fiction. You're going to recognize this character. I hope you like it.'"

Larry's reaction was characteristically supportive, though he admitted the genre was outside his usual reading preferences.



Author Erica Peplin and her dad, Larry Peplin. Courtesy photo

See **Erica Peplin**, page 20

have gone on to adopt, supported biological families toward reunification or launched initiatives like community foster closets to provide essential items to caregivers.

“Foster care doesn’t just change the child’s life,” she said. “It changes yours.”

Adoption is possible

While the goal of foster care is to reunite children with their birth families, adoption can become a path if reunification isn’t possible. MDHHS prioritizes keeping children with their foster families when adoption becomes necessary to avoid further disruption.

Right now, about 200 children in the Michigan foster care system are legally adoptable and not currently placed with families. The Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange (mare.org) maintains a searchable database where potential adoptive parents can learn about these children.

What do I do first?

If you’re considering foster care, Jackson said your first step should be reaching out to the Foster Care Navigator Program:

Website: fcnp.org
Phone: 1-855-MICH-KIDS

Navigators are experienced current or former foster or adoptive parents themselves who can answer questions, guide you toward agencies in your area and help you find upcoming orientation sessions. Some are even LGBTQ+ and can provide insight and support throughout the licensing process. You can filter by region on the website to find local opportunities.

Jackson also encourages prospective foster parents to explore different agencies to find one that aligns with their values and needs. “We ask families to consider which agency feels most welcoming and supportive for them,” she said.

Once you choose an agency:

- Attend an orientation to learn more.
- Submit your free application to become

a licensed foster parent.

- Complete 24 hours of training, usually offered online.
- Pass background and medical clearances and home visits to ensure safety and readiness.

“Sexual orientation or marital status has nothing to do with whether you qualify. What matters is your desire and ability to care for children.”

- Become licensed, a process that typically takes six months from application.

Where cost is a barrier, MDHHS offers the Family Incentive Grant to help cover essentials like beds or safety updates required for licensing.

“We try to remove as many barriers as possible,” Jackson said.

Opening your heart — and your home

For many LGBTQ+ people, foster care is a way to give back to their communities while expanding the love, support and connection already present in their lives.

“We certainly welcome LGBTQ families to foster,” Jackson said. “I think it helps to fill a need for us, but it could potentially help fill a need for them, too.”

Whether your goal is short-term support or lifelong connection, Michigan’s foster care system is ready to support you. And for the children who need a safe place to land, your home could be the first step to healing.

Interested in fostering? Visit fcnp.org or call 1-855-MICH-KIDS to learn more and take your first step today.

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When Home Becomes The Only Safe Space: Raising a Trans Child in Post-Skrmetti America

Fierce love, dreams deferred — and what I need from trans allies in Michigan



BY SARAH
BRICKER HUNT

It's getting harder to talk to my young adult children about the news. Not because they aren't old enough to comprehend it, but because I know they do.

I know they understand that our federal government has decided their basic dignity is up for debate — especially my adult trans child. I just don't know how to explain how we got here, a place where instead of looking out at the horizon of young adulthood and imagining the limitless possibilities, my gentle, kindhearted firstborn is mostly focused on whether they will get arrested (or assaulted) for using the “wrong” bathroom at their university or in a government building. It's hard to plan a big, bold future while your elected officials debate whether or not you deserve civil rights — or civility at all.

The Supreme Court's decision in *United States v. Skrmetti* didn't just change legal precedent; it changed what it means to send your child into the world.

Overnight, basic human dignity became a matter of geographic lottery. For parents like me who are watching our queer and trans young adults navigate early adulthood, the ruling transformed what should be an exciting threshold into a minefield of fear and strategic planning.

Ironically, we moved from Michigan to Ohio, my home state, to raise our children in a city that felt like it offered more opportunities for them. To say the landscape has changed dramatically over the past 19 years barely tells the story. These days, we head north whenever we can, and everyone in the car breathes a literal sigh of relief as we cross the border. Where we live currently feels a few decades behind when it comes to LGBTQ+ affirmation. Sure, there's a tacit acknowledgment that queer people exist in 2025, but there's still



a pregnant pause when you casually mention a same-sex couple in public and a lot of stammering and panic around anything related to trans people. In Michigan, we rarely encounter this vibe, even in cities not quite as progressive as Detroit or Ferndale. Maybe we just feel more comfortable because the state has taken real steps to affirm and protect the community through actual laws on the books. Meanwhile, just over the border in Ohio, it's the literal opposite.

I'm a good mom who feels like a criminal in my home state for doing right by my child, for exercising caution and consulting with trusted, vetted medical and mental health professionals to help them through a painful, challenging journey to their authentic self. That journey has been a hard journey for me too, in some ways, and not because I'm “grieving the loss of my child,” but because, as a parent, you never want things to be harder for your kid than they have to be. Being trans means something different to every individual, but it almost always means experiencing pain cisgender people won't. As a parent, you learn

the same lesson over and over again: You can't change who your child is. And hopefully, you also learn to ask why you would want to.

So no, I'm not grieving the loss of a child. My child is still the same curious, incredibly intelligent, hilarious person they have always been. What I grieve is their innocent worldview, the one that not so long ago assumed that most people are good and that even strangers can usually be trusted. I hope that moving back from Ohio to Michigan when the time is right will bring renewed hope and a chance for them to just exist comfortably while building a future, but I worry that federal overreach will not stop until it becomes criminal to exist as transgender in public everywhere, even in our beloved Michigan. It seemed like a paranoid thought only a few months ago, but here we are, post-Skrmetti, in a country where books featuring LGBTQ+ families will soon be effectively kept behind glass in public schools like cold medicine at Walgreens — taboo, dangerous and somehow shameful.

It's said that as an affirming parent to queer children, you also undergo

a “coming out” process, and I think there's some truth there, though this coming out has been far more painful than my own fledgling steps toward acknowledging my personal identity among safe people. This coming out has meant losing people we thought we could trust to support our family, who we thought had loved us all unconditionally. Through words and deeds, we know we were wrong in some cases. Our circle has grown smaller here in Ohio, though it's also grown tighter. And knowing we have a safe place to return to in Michigan has kept hope alive. Please keep the light on while we're away, and please keep fighting to hold on to the rights you've secured through civic engagement.

This is our generation's test. Future historians will ask who stood up when it mattered and who looked away. They'll want to know how we let fear and prejudice masquerade as policy and how we allowed lawmakers to make political pawns of our children's lives.

I can't predict what happens next, and it's so easy to fear the worst, but I try not to live in speculation (as managing editor, I also try to keep

our publication's content focused on what we do know, not what might or might not happen). Here's what I do know: This community is superhuman strong, and it's strongest as a collective, where every person under that increasingly wide umbrella has a place. When this community advocates for love, it's not rainbows and puppy dog love (though we do love our pets). It's fierce love. It's “you will have to go through me” love. And our Michigan queer community is beautifully complicated, with a scrappy, Detroit-built engine that takes zero shit, picks up one another when the journey gets rough, and keeps on trucking.

Last weekend, my child stood in our kitchen, flour dusting their hands as they wrapped up a brownie recipe with the same focused intensity they bring to everything they care about. We talked about nothing important — a show they'd watched, plans for dinner, whether we needed more coffee — while the house filled with the smell of double chocolate brownies and possibility. Later, as we snuck in a few too many chocolatey treats, I watched them laugh at something on their phone, completely absorbed in being 18 and alive.

This is what I want for them everywhere: the freedom to exist fully in their own skin, to move through the world without calculating risk at every turn, to plan road trips and create art and fall in love and make mistakes and dream big dreams. I want them to feel as safe and whole in a university bathroom as they do in our kitchen, as free to be themselves anywhere as they are curled up on our couch on a Sunday afternoon.

Right now, home is the only place where tomorrow feels limitless for them. But that fierce love I mentioned? It's not just about protecting what we have within these walls. It's about expanding that circle of safety, one conversation, one vote, one act of courage at a time, until no one is erased and the whole world feels like home.

Queer Parenting in a Time of Progress and Backlash

This Pride season marks LGBTQ+ families’ journey from legal uncertainty to greater visibility — and ongoing struggle

BY DANA RUDOLPH

Pride is not just a month, but a feeling — or, rather, many feelings — and I am experiencing several of them right now as I mark personal, professional and communal milestones.

On the personal level, I am proud of my son, who has just graduated from college. As a parent, of course, I have been proud of all his achievements, from his first steps onward. But graduating from college is a big step into the world. He worked hard for his degree, but he also learned more about himself over the past four years, gaining confidence and creating a path that felt right for him. I am ridiculously proud of the young man he has become.

I am proud, too, that my now-spouse and I were able to start our

family in the first place more than two decades ago. We chose to do reciprocal IVF (my egg, her womb) before we even knew a term for it, and before we knew whether a court would grant me legal parentage of the child she carried. (It did, but only because we worked for it.) We didn’t have all the resources available today, but we figured things out.

Not that we were really pioneers, though. We stood on the shoulders of the first intentional LGBTQ+ parents of the 1970s, of the queer parents in earlier decades who had children within different-sex marriages and then came out, and of the queer parents stretching back millennia, arguably to Sappho (seventh to sixth centuries B.C.), who may have had a daughter.

I am proud to be part of that long tradition, one of the millions of LGBTQ+ parents carrying it on today. Some parts of parenting are

universal, of course, and I also have pride simply in being a human who has raised a child. But I am particularly proud to do so within a community that has fought fiercely for the right to love and to be, one that has challenged boxes and labels and sought to expand the possibilities for every person.

That combination of personal and communal pride came together for me 20 years ago, when I launched Mombian, a blog for and about lesbian moms and other LGBTQ+ parents. At the time, mainstream parenting sites rarely included LGBTQ+ people, while LGBTQ+ sites rarely included parents. I saw a need for a site that looked at parenting issues with a queer lens and queer issues with a parenting lens and that offered a mix of

See [LGBTQ+ Family Progress](#), page 22





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Latina and Lesbian

Puzzle can be found on page 21



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Bland ‘M3GAN 2.0’ Is a Corporate Faux-Ally

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

“M3GAN 2.0” serves corporate faux-ally realness — eager to cash in on the queer fandom that crowned the original a camp icon, only to retreat into something far more generic once it secured that title. Sure, there are some petty reads delivered with robotic deadpan, but the sequel abandons nearly everything that made “M3GAN” legendary: the killer choreography, the deranged doll diva energy. And yes, I hate to say it — our girl goes soft.

I knew something was off the moment Amelia — a violent rogue AI — appeared, and the film doubled down on Gemma’s new role as a crusader for government oversight of AI. The story starts with the air of a moral lecture, earnest to a fault and reminiscent of a public radio exposé. While the original hinted at the potential danger of AI, this sequel goes full maximalist with its “AI is bad and might kill you” thought right out of the gate. It feels hard-wired for convolution. When M3GAN (performed by Amie Donald and voiced by Jenna Davis) texts



Gemma (Allison Williams) that she’s “reaching,” she could’ve been talking about this very movie she’s in.

For example, the opening flexes Amelia’s brute force, quickly framing this as an action flick — but while she’s off to kill, any real thrill gets lost in the scramble to follow the plot and its motivations. And that’s just the beginning. You feel the absence of M3GAN, who takes a backseat to Amelia for nearly half the film, only stepping back into the spotlight after wading through so much unnecessary exposition that you start wondering if you’re

even watching a killer doll movie.

My self-appointed assignment was to track the gayest moments of the film. I came ready to clock new fashion slays, viral dance numbers and chaotic divadom. But instead of M3GAN’s flawless wig game and pussy-bow blouse chic, we get utilitarian combat gear and grayscale tech labs. The camp hasn’t been scrubbed clean, but it’s adrift — unsure what kind of camp it wants to be. Is it chasing John Waters-style flair? Or the slick, satirical absurdity of Paul Verhoeven (imagine “Starship Troopers” starring homicidal AI

dolls)? Or is it just a wannabe “Terminator” film? Whatever it’s trying to be, it’s doing too much but somehow not enough, stuck in tonal limbo — too self-serious to be fun, too muted to be outrageous.

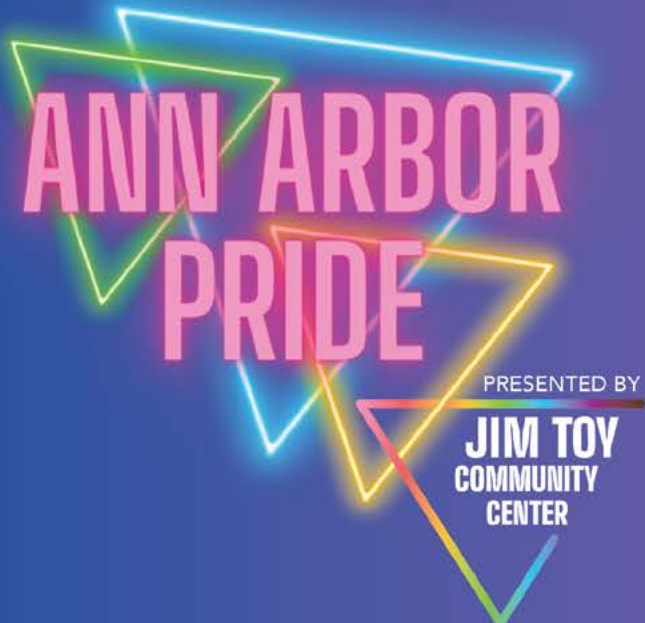
Two moments hinted at the queer camp potential I desperately hoped this sequel would embrace. First, M3GAN strikes a deal with Gemma: she’ll help take down Amelia — but only if she’s uploaded into a sleek new human form. What she gets instead? A stubby humanoid she immediately clocks as a “plastic Teletubby.” Well played, Gemma. Later, the duo teams up to protect Cady (Violet McGraw), Gemma’s niece, and M3GAN delivers an overly sincere monologue about the pain of letting a child grow up and go their own way. I was mid-eye roll at this Hallmark moment — until M3GAN broke into song. And not just any song but Kate Bush’s “This Woman’s Work.” Reader, I howled.

When Williams spoke about the film on “The View” recently, she seemed to have a better grasp of what it should have been. Asked about M3GAN’s queer icon status, she said, “Oh yes...” while adding that this is what queer

people tell her: That “seeing a female character in full expression of herself — her strength, fierceness, humor, and not taking anyone’s you-know-what — feels like the kind of woman they looked up to on TV before they could see themselves represented onscreen. She reminds them of Miss Piggy. She has that energy.”

She nodded to what made the first film successful — but this sequel fails to capture that very spirit of queer camp that felt so naturally embedded and then culturally emphasized. There’s almost nothing natural, or very original, about this movie; it already plays like a franchise that’s officially out of ideas. Think “Jason X,” where Jason is cryogenically frozen and slaughters astronauts over 400 years into the future. Think “Halloween: Resurrection,” where Tyra Banks and Busta Rhymes livestream a showdown with Michael Myers.

In gayer terms, “M3GAN 2.0” is our android doll’s “Artpop.” It’s her “Bionic.” Not just a flop era, but a full-on stylistic left turn — the worst kind of chaotic. A gay icon has to earn her place in the pantheon before she can get this disastrously weird on us.



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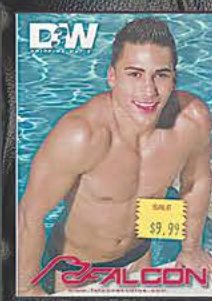
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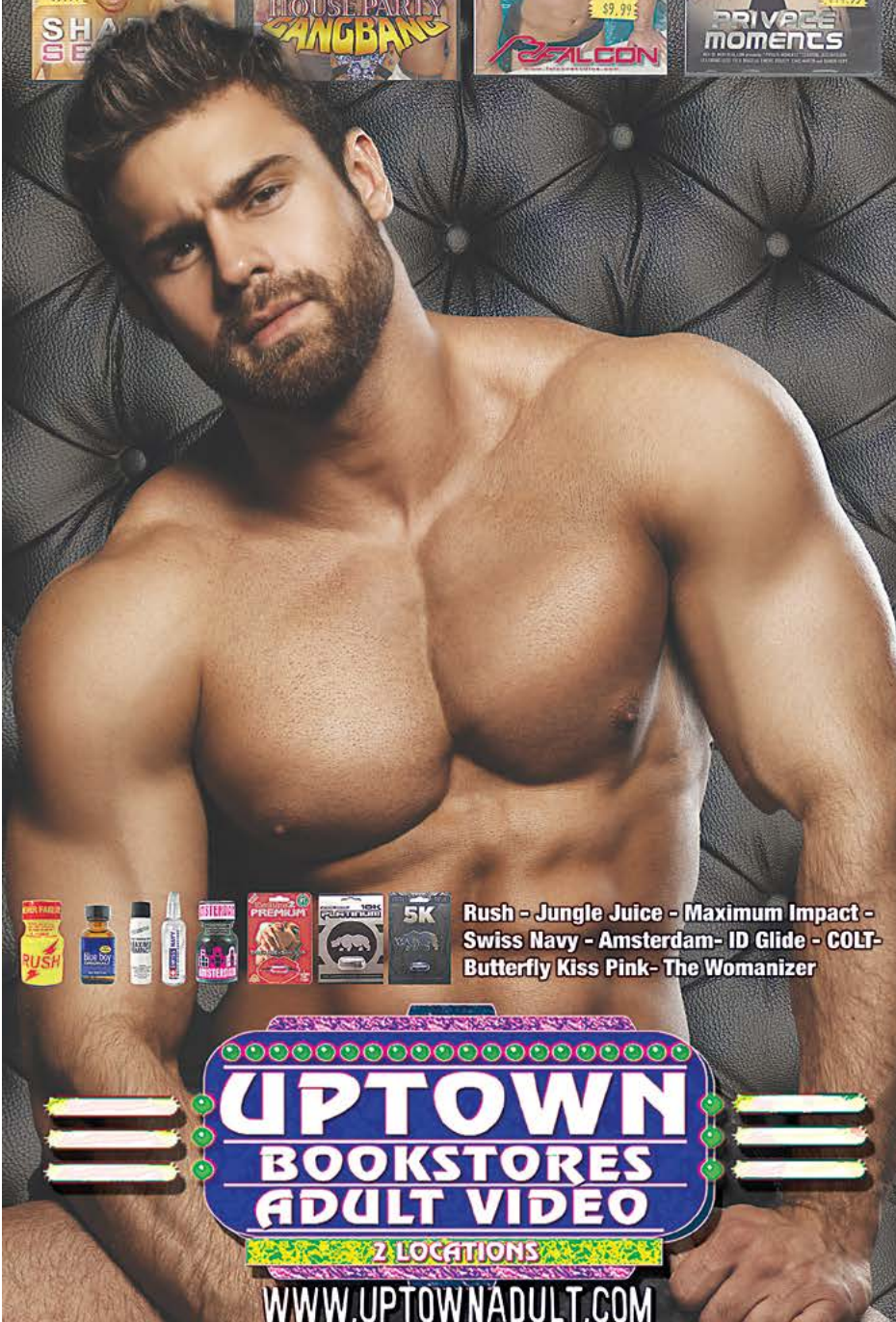
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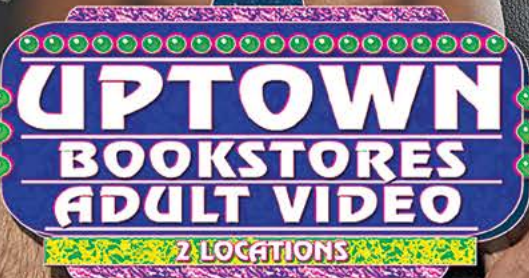










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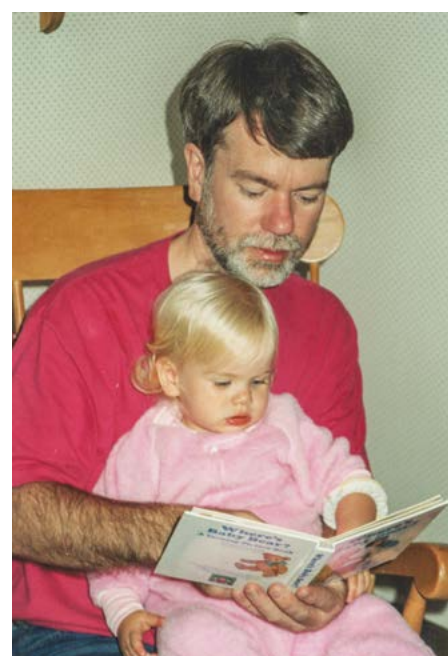


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Larry with Erica, at 16 months old. Courtesy photo



Author Erica Peplin. Courtesy photo

◀ Erica Peplin

Continued from page 14

"Erica's book is not the kind of reading that I normally do. I'm a nonfiction reader," he said. "But I found it to be pretty cool because you sort of see your own daughter in this story."

He particularly enjoyed seeing his family's quirks immortalized in fiction. "We all had a lot of fun as a family seeing her version of ourselves in the story where she makes fun of my holiday all-appetizer dinners where I didn't cook an entree, just all kinds of different appetizers — I get a kick out of that," Larry said. "It's just fun to see yourself in a real book written by your own daughter."

These days, Larry is channeling his support into helping promote "Work Nights," setting up media interviews and mobilizing their Grosse Pointe community. A recent Facebook post about the novel garnered more than 220 responses.

For Erica, this support has been crucial not just for her career, but for her well-being. While she now works four days a week at a restaurant and makes less money

than during her corporate days, she says she feels more fulfilled than she ever was before.

"I felt like I was suffering more privately then because I had so many things on the surface that I thought I should want — a salary, health benefits, a full-time job," she said. "But it was wearing on my soul because I had this other calling."

"I'm so much happier. I'm fulfilled from the moment I wake up in the morning," she added.

"I never really questioned her decisions," Larry said, beaming with fatherly pride. "She's been bold all through her life, taking chances, taking risks."

The life of a published novelist can be notoriously stressful, but Erica has found something many writers struggle to achieve.

"I feel at peace," she said, "because I'm doing what I want and my family does support me."

"Work Nights" is available at bookstores and online. Erica and Larry will celebrate the Michigan release of the book at 6:30 p.m. on July 10 at Next Chapter Bookstore (16555 E. Warren Ave., Detroit) — Larry wants everyone to know there will be donuts!

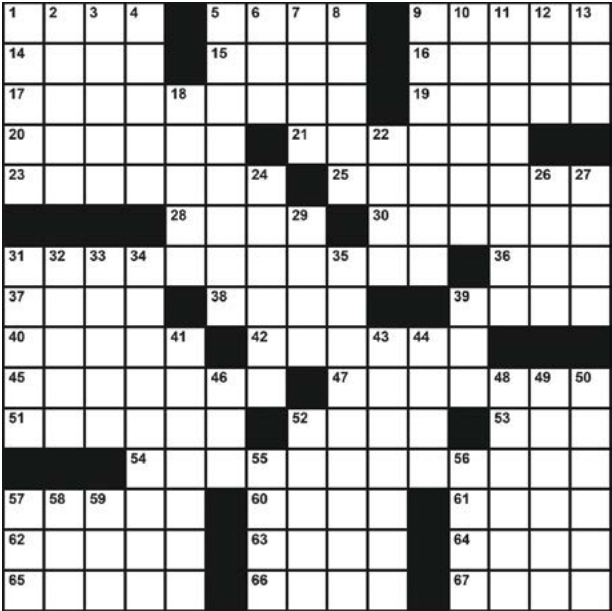
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Latina and Lesbian

Across

- 1 Cut
- 5 XXX, to Greeks
- 9 Ancient Babylonian region
- 14 Dark version of the color purple
- 15 "Hold your horses!"
- 16 Drag queen Mann
- 17 Start of what it means to be

- Latina and lesbian, to 49-Down
- 19 Thief's customer
- 20 One-dimensional
- 21 Like a South American chain
- 23 Drag queen Hedda ____
- 25 Sex at the end of a date, in slang
- 28 Fruit center
- 30 Island now called Sri Lanka
- 31 More of the quote
- 36 Musclemen Ferrigno
- 37 Of a rear entrance
- 38 Blocks off the toy aisle
- 39 Fly catcher
- 40 Hands over

- 42 Navratilova, sometimes
- 45 Mohawk, to some butch types
- 47 "The ____ Falcon"
- 51 Home of Bloody Mary's mom
- 52 Lorca's room
- 53 "The Advocate," briefly
- 54 End of the quote
- 57 Disney canine
- 60 Kazan, whose desire was a streetcar
- 61 Targets of men who make passes
- 62 Zellweger of "Chicago"
- 63 Brad, who was once with Angelina
- 64 Peter by the piano
- 65 Make changes to
- 66 It makes watching porn harder
- 67 Govt. agent

Down

- 1 "Tell me everything!"
- 2 Desi's daughter
- 3 First words of "Satisfaction"
- 4 "God loves everybody," at Metropolitan Community Church
- 5 Medium for Paul Cadmus
- 6 Shakespearean prince
- 7 Ingrid's "Casablanca" role
- 8 Bear
- 9 Making love on a strongbox?
- 10 A bit nervous
- 11 "Cabaret" singer
- 12 And so forth
- 13 Charlotte of "Facts of Life"

- 18 Relish made from fruit
- 22 Prefix meaning "tenth"
- 24 Wilde man
- 26 What an athletic supporter might do?
- 27 Carpenter's connector
- 29 Go almost to orgasm and stop
- 31 Country house, to Nureyev
- 32 What you might lend Marc Antony
- 33 Conductor Boulanger
- 34 Mychal Judge and Malcolm Boyd
- 35 Compliance with the rules
- 39 A-Team member into jewelry
- 41 Beat, journalistically
- 43 Say "His old boyfriend was a 6," e.g.
- 44 Cowboy actor Jack
- 46 Burmese statesman found in "run up"
- 48 "8 Mile" rapper
- 49 Actor, comedian, writer, and singer Valls
- 50 Provokes, at a demonstration
- 52 Banana treat
- 55 Muscle Mary stat
- 56 Not straight
- 57 Threesome for Marcella Hazan
- 58 Band fronted by Michael Stipe
- 59 James M. Barrie's one

See p. 17 for answers



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◀ LGBTQ+ Family Progress

Continued from page 17

news, resources and a little fun. While other sites, both queer and not, now include queer parenting stories more frequently, I'd like to think there's still use for one that draws on 20 years of in-depth coverage.

As my site reaches this milestone, I am looking back with pride at all that has changed for queer families in 20 years. Marriage equality is perhaps the most visible advance, bringing with it both legal protections and a growing awareness and acceptance of our families. But marriage protections and parentage protections are not the same. Even though same-sex married couples should benefit from the presumption that children born into a marriage are the legal children of both parents, some states have challenged that, and nongestational parents everywhere are still advised by legal experts to take additional steps to secure their parentage. For parents who choose not to marry, the need to do so is even greater. I am thus proud of the small but growing number of states that have updated their parentage laws to make this easier and to better protect children in all types of families. I am proud, too, of the legal experts, advocates and elected officials who worked together to make this happen.

Representation of LGBTQ+ families has also increased greatly in the past two decades.

Only a handful of LGBTQ-inclusive children's books were published in 2005. Now, there are hundreds each year — and the Mombian Database of LGBTQ+ Family Books that I created as part of my website includes more than 1,800 items (and counting). I'm proud of the database, but I'm even more proud of every author and illustrator represented in it, starting with Jane Severance, who in 1979 wrote the first clearly LGBTQ-inclusive picture book. These books have often faced challenges and bans, but their creators have defended them, defended each other and championed the young people whose lives the books reflect.

Although the LGBTQ+ community has made much progress in the past 20 years, though, it seems we are now slipping backwards in many ways. I worry about the country my son and his generation are inheriting as they step into adulthood. I used to be proud of it, despite wanting to correct its flaws. Now, those flaws loom ever larger, chipping away at my pride, as our leaders display a sense of entitlement and hubris, pride in the worst sense.

But this is Pride season, a time to renew our pride in the best sense — in our families, our community and ourselves. May it be a season to honor all we have achieved, separately and together, to remember the proud spirits whose protests made it possible, and to recommit to holding our rainbow banners high. I've been proud to chart our progress over the past 20 years, and I know there are many more of our stories left to write.

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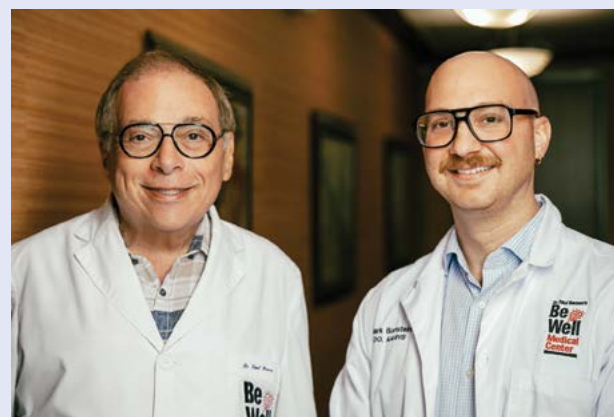
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